Mar 3, 2018

72 Go! | Luke 10:1-12, 17-20 Sermon

Rev. Dr. Jonathan M. Romig

I want to start by talking about being a pastor. What are pastors for? At our church, we believe elders are called to lead and shepherd, deacons are called to serve the people, and the pastor is called to equip the congregation to engage in ministry. Our philosophy of ministry says:

> **Staff Equipped**: We believe that Pastors are called to serve the church by equipping the believers for the work of the ministry.

This is based on what the Bible says our job is.

> **Ephesians 4:11-12** So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up

But what do we mean by "equipping" for ministry? Is it the Pastor's primary job to teach people how to run the church, or is the ministry we're talking about broader than that? I believe it's my job to help you use your whole life for Jesus, and while that may mean serving Christ on a church volunteer team, I think it first means using your normal everyday life to spread the love and good news of Jesus Christ. It means operating in the ways God has wired you, and in the places God has placed you, with the brothers and sisters-in-Christ around you, to love God and love your neighbors in the name of Jesus.

In today's text in Luke we come to the story of normal everyday people who Jesus equips for ministry. But he doesn't label them "pastor." When Jesus calls the twelve disciples, he designates them "Apostles," which means "someone sent as a messenger" (Luke 6:12-16). In Luke 10, Jesus uses this word for send ("apostello") again, but not to describe the twelve, but to send out the rest of his followers.

> **Luke 10:1** After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go.

You don't need to be a big-a "Apostle" to be a little-a "apostle." If you believe in Jesus, you're a little-a "apostle." God has deputized you into his service. You don't need a title to serve Jesus and love him.

Jesus sends us out. (Luke 10:1-12)

Jesus picked the twelve disciples to signify the twelve tribes of Israel—to say he is starting a new chapter among the people of God. But then he chooses 72 because all the way back in Genesis 10, the Bible lists 72 nations (in the Greek version, LXX). We call this chapter "The Table of Nations." So here Jesus is using the 12 to found Christianity and sending out the 72 to symbolically reach the whole world.

But what does this have to do with us? You and I are not big-A Apostles, but you and I are sent. Luke calls them the "seventy-two others." I think you and I are the others. We receive the same commission as them. As others, we're sent by Jesus out "ahead of him." In Luke 1-9, Jesus spends most of his ministry in and around northern Galilee, but in Luke 9:51 Jesus sets out for Jerusalem. He begins his journey, and he sends his followers ahead of him to prepare the way. They are like John the Baptist, preparing the way for the Lord. We too are called to prepare the way for the Lord.

All Scriptures are quoted from the New International Version (NIV®) unless otherwise noted.

Your frontline *is the place where you spend the majority of your time with non-Christians*. So it could be your neighborhood, your office, your college friends, your gym, the local coffee shop, anywhere. Do you believe Jesus has sent you there to prepare for his coming? I think this requires a shift in how we think about our frontlines. Today, when I go to work, I'm getting my office ready for Jesus. Tonight, when I have dinner with my neighbors, I'm getting our neighborhood ready for Jesus. Tomorrow, when I go to school, I'm getting my school ready for Jesus.

Now it's not that Jesus isn't there already (he's omnipresent), but this does take the pressure off us. I'm going to get ready for Jesus, but he decides when he shows up. This is a big calling. **There are two truths and three commands that Jesus gives us to equip us for this task.**

We are valuable. (v2)

First truth—we are valuable to God and his mission. In verse 2 Jesus says, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few." What's the most valuable commodity any business has? Its people, its employees, its customers. Without people, the harvest won't come in. Jesus could say a command, and all the wheat and fruit could magically float in, but that's not how he likes to work. He likes to use his creation to do his work. *Jesus loves to work through normal people in their everyday lives to produce a great harvest*.

The Boston Vere Institue by Chris Lake reports that 78% of people "think their work is less valuable than a pastor." Do you feel you're a valuable part of what God is doing, or do you just think the pastor and elders and worship team are more valuable? Every harvest worker is valuable, whether in full-time church ministry, or full-time everyday ministry. *We are (all) valuable*.

We can't do it alone. (v1-2)

Truth number two—we can't do it by ourselves. We need two types of help. First, we need the Holy Spirit's help, which we receive through prayer. In verse 2, Jesus says, "Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field." That word for "ask" means "pray." What's our human response when we hear about a need? To do something! To get to work! But what if we're just to first get on our knees and pray? I find that when I start my y with prayer, I go about my day less anxiously and sometimes more productively than when I jump right into my to-do list.

The second type of help comes from other Christians. If we go back to look at verse 1, we see Jesus "sent them two by two." He doesn't send them alone. Maybe you want to reach your frontline, but you feel afraid or burnt out. Pray for Jesus to give you another Christian in your workplace, school, or neighborhood to help you reach those around you. I need my wife to help me pray for our frontline, to help me invite people over for dinner, and I get to help her by chaperoning school dances and spending time with her coworkers.

One of our church members shared her frontline story last week, how she prayed for her neighborhood (her frontline), but also for this church (other Christians). God brought it all together, using her and her church family to reach her neighbors. When we as a church went Christmas caroling in her neighborhood, we were helping her reach her frontline. Tonight, after the service, I want you to ask someone during fellowship time about their frontline. Say, "How's your frontline?" Then ask how you can pray for their frontline, "How can I pray for your frontline?" We all need prayer and encouragement to reach our frontlines.

Our two truths are: *We are valuable and we can't do it alone*. Now three commands.

Go weak! (v3)

Jesus says in verse 3, “Go.” This isn’t a suggestion, “Go?” This is a command, “Go!” But what happens when you break routine? What happens when we leave our comfort zone, what we’re used to? We put ourselves at risk. “I am sending you out like lambs among wolves.” Jesus doesn’t win motivator of the year. Go! It’s going to be hard and dangerous and people will want to knock you down.

I listened to a message by Neil Hudson (affiliate link) this week. He’s a pastor in the UK and works with the London Institute for Contemporary Christianity (LICC), the organization that produced Fruitfulness on the Frontline (affiliate link). He preached on Luke 10 at Park Street Church in downtown Boston, and he shared a story of a woman named Betty from a church near San Francisco.

Betty learned about the idea of a frontline but felt like it was a difficult challenge for her because she was retired. She didn’t have an office she was in every day, but she did have a gym. She went to that gym for several years but her friendships there were strictly gym related. She began to expect that God would do something and he did. One of the women said she was worried about her daughter, and Betty told her that when she was worried about her own daughter she prayed for her. Betty asked if she could pray with her right then, and she agreed, so she prayed with her.

A few days later Betty’s gym friend told her she felt her daughter was safe because of Betty’s prayers. Betty asked if she could pray with her again to thank God, and she did. And then Betty asked her gym friend if she had ever invited Jesus into her life. She said she hadn’t, and so Betty asked if she wanted to pray to invite him into her life right then, and she did. So Betty and this woman prayed to invite Jesus into her life. A little while after this Betty invites her and another gym friend to a ladies event and they both come, plus the second lady brings a friend. Now the four women attend a ladies Bible study together.

But then Neil goes back through this story and points out Betty’s vulnerability, her weakness. She is retired. She doesn’t have a lot of contacts. When God does bring another woman to her, she doesn’t say, “I’ll pray for you” but says, “When I’m worried about my daughter, I’ve found prayer really helps.” That’s a place of weakness, not strength. I’m no better than you. I’m needy. Then she offers to pray for her right there. That puts her at risk. What if she says no? It’s much easier to say, “I’ll pray for you!” Then when the story comes back around, Betty once again says, “Can we thank God together?” More vulnerability. And then she asks her if she wants to know Jesus, and then invites her to church. At any moment this woman could have turned into a bear and bitten Betty. She could bad-mouthed her around the gym or turned away. But Betty kept putting herself at risk for Jesus and Jesus used her to bring in the harvest. *Go weak!*

Where’s a place in your life that you can be vulnerable with others? Would you pray that Jesus gives you an opportunity this week to be weak and vulnerable for him? I had two opportunities this last week, one I was open and weak, and one I closed up. You may not get it right, but that’s okay, Jesus can use you again. You can start in the foyer after the service by sharing about your frontline. First command. *Go weak!* Second…

Go dependent! (v4-8)

In verse 4 Jesus says, “Do not take a purse or bag or sandals; and do not greet anyone on the road.” Don’t depend on your money or your resources for your success! Don’t depend on your amazing advertising or social media presence. Don’t depend on your social relationships. Depend on me! And then Jesus instructs his disciples to stay in the homes of the people they meet and to eat and drink what they’re offered. If you look at Jesus’ journey from Galilee to Jerusalem, he spent time in the homes of Pharisees, but also of tax collectors and sinners. And since he had to go along the edge of Samaria, his followers may have stayed with non-Jews (Luke 17:11).

Jesus is putting his follower’s holiness at risk. He’s encouraging them to go into the home of whoever welcomes them, whether they are Jewish or not, whether they eat kosher food or unclean food. These

followers are forced into uncomfortable situations where instead of relying on ritual purity or tradition, they have to depend on Jesus' acceptance of them for their holiness.

None of us would ever say we would remove ourselves from others because of ritual purity. But have you ever said, "I can't be friends with that person because they're no good" or "we can't spend time with that family because they'll be a bad influence on my family." I understand we need healthy boundaries, but we also need to be present with those who need Christ. We need to spend time with those who are far from Jesus. If you're a teen, spend time with teens that need Jesus. Don't flirt to convert, but pray to convert.

Jesus says to these followers. "If you're welcomed, stay with them!" I like to call this "messy discipleship." Messy discipleship is when we go places that make us uncomfortable and put ourselves and our families at risk for the sake of bringing others to Jesus. We don't let the risk of them negatively influencing us hold us back from seeking to influence them with the love of Jesus. In messy discipleship we can't depend on our circumstances for our holiness, but have to depend entirely on Jesus. *First. Go weak. Second. Go dependent. Third…*

Go expectant! (v9)

I'm amazed by what Jesus says the 72 should do when they are welcomed. Verse 9, "Heal the sick who are there and tell them, 'The Kingdom of God has come near to you.'" So when you go back to work or school on Monday, I want you to find a coworker who has a cold and pray that God would heal them. Actually, I don't think this is that far off. Jesus still heals people today, supernaturally and naturally.

Many of you know that Jennie received good news recently that she is now cancer free. Praise God! But when I spoke to Jennie, she said the level of healing and absence of cancer cells is really unusual. She has not just beaten cancer. The cancer is gone! When Jennie first found out that she got cancer, she called me and asked me to come and pray for her, and then I asked if she was interested in having the Elders anoint her and pray over her before she started her treatment, and she was.

> **James 5:14-15** Is anyone among you sick? Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise them up. If they have sinned, they will be forgiven. (NIV)

The Bible calls us to have the Elders anoint and pray for us. Jennie donated massage oil from her business, so we have plenty of oil! If you're sick, please let us pray for you. I believe Jesus can heal people to advance his kingdom. As followers, we have the unique opportunity to pray God would heal people and when they're healed, tell them, "It's because of Jesus!" Let's expect Jesus to do great things. *Go expectant!*

So how does this work out for the 72? Do they end up getting eaten by wolves? How is this going to work for us? Will we be okay? We will actually be more than okay.

When we go out we will come back with joy. (Luke 10:17-20)

Look at how the 72 come back in verse 17, "The seventy-two returned with joy and said, "Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name." And then in verse 21 it says Jesus was full of joy! But in verse 20 Jesus says this, "However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven." Jesus' master plan of evangelism will work, but at the end of the day, there's something more important. The most important thing of all is knowing Jesus and the salvation we have in him.

The 72 could cast out demons "in Jesus' name" because they knew Jesus. Don't rejoice that the mission will succeed. Rejoice that Jesus loves you. At the end of the day, it's not the possibility of success that drives us, but the love of Jesus. When we realize Jesus is the most valuable and precious Son of God, and that he was

willing to become weak and vulnerable for us, it fills us with joy. Jesus depended on his father all the way to the cross with the great expectation that God would use his sacrifice to save us. *When we go out we will come back with joy. Go weak! Go dependent! Go expectant!*

Discussion Questions

These questions are great for small groups, bible studies, or personal reflection:

1. What does it mean to be equipped to serve Jesus?
2. What is a frontline and why does it matter?
3. How does being valuable to God shape how you share Christ?
4. What part can your church community play in helping you share Jesus?
5. Share a story of a time you were weak, and it turned out to be a blessing.
6. What does dependency on God look like in your life?
7. Do you feel hopeful and expectant about your frontline? Why or why not?
8. What part can prayer pray in taking a next step?

Luke Sermon Series

Go through the Gospel of Luke with Jonathan Romig in this sermon series: The Certain Gospel.

Resource Recommendations

Each of the following are **affiliate links**, which means we get a small percentage if you purchase the resource through the link. We also recommend checking out your local library or thrift store.

Luke 12-24 for You: For Reading, for Feeding, for Leading (God's Word for You Commentary Series) by Mike McKinley

Imagine Church: Releasing Dynamic Everyday Disciples by Neil Hudson

Sources

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MGD, s.v. "ἀπόστολος," paragraph 1999. https://accordance.bible/link/read/Mounce_Greek_Dictionary#1999

Rev. Dr. Jonathan Romig originally preached this sermon at Cornerstone Congregational Church *in Westford, MA on March 3rd, 2018 when he served there as Pastor. Access an online version at* Substack. *Jonathan attended Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary (*GCTS*) where he earned his Master of Divinity (M.Div) and Doctor of Ministry (D.Min).*

Watch the original sermon on YouTube.